

Introduction: From Islamic Theology to Analytic Philosophy

Safaruk Chowdhury and Ramon Harvey

The period in Arabia before the coming of Islam is referred to in the Qur'an as the Jāhiliyya, which is sometimes translated as the Age of Ignorance.¹ Notwithstanding legitimate queries about the extent to which the image of pre-Islamic Arabia was shaped by the interests of distinct early Muslim audiences,² there is a genuine sense in which the Islamic civilisation that subsequently emerged saw itself as bringing the ideal of knowledge (*'ilm*) to perfection.³ This included the encounter with existing religious and philosophical traditions, the translation of prevailing approaches to knowledge into Arabic, and their integration within diverse Islamic scholarly cultures. Such optimism about the potential for the realisation of knowledge contrasts with the popular Western imagination of Islam as antipathetic to intellectual inquiry. Although this misconception has thankfully been banished within serious scholarly conversation, the relationship of traditional Islamic frameworks of thought to the wider debates of contemporary religious epistemology remains an open question.

In the context of Western academia, these wider debates have been historically dominated by Christian religious epistemology. In the Anglophone world, this has led to Christian philosophers and theologians coming to

1 Within the scripture, the Jāhiliyya is associated with impiety, injustice, lewdness and rage. See Q. 3:154, 5:50, 33:33, 48:26. This may lead to the view that it is the antithesis of *ḥilm* (forbearance), rather than *'ilm* (knowledge), although these moral defects can also be associated with ignorance. See Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb*, p. 2. Appreciation is due to Michael Mumisa for highlighting this point in person.

2 See Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, pp. 257–58.

3 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 2. He writes: "*'ilm* is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as *'ilm*'.

terms with the way in which their own tradition deals with religious knowledge within the dominant paradigm of analytic philosophy. This discourse is at least half a century old, having reached a state of considerable maturity and nuance. Yet, the emergence of global approaches to philosophy of religion has disrupted the Christian hegemony in religious epistemology. Other religious discourses, including those of Islam, not only have their own intellectual agendas with which they engage with the resources offered by Christian thinking, but they also pose new questions that may challenge existing ideas and eventually reshape the field into a more dynamic and multipolar reality.

The present volume was conceived from the outset as a founding document of analytic Islamic epistemology. That is, with it we seek to constitute a new subfield of academic study, although we recognise that individual scholarly work germane to it already exists. Analytic Islamic epistemology can be defined as the use of intellectual frameworks drawn from the analytic tradition to explore and extend epistemological questions relevant to Islamic theology. A couple of caveats are in order. First, as an initial foray into this field of study, the reader will not only encounter the writing of epistemologists within the pages of this book. To map major contours of epistemological thought within Islam in an adequate fashion – despite recognising that inevitably many interesting developments cannot be covered – it was necessary to bring on board intellectual historians specialised in various Islamic periods and traditions. Second, our focus on the analytic tradition does not signal any intended slight towards the philosophical approach known as the continental or, perhaps better, phenomenological tradition. Despite valuing the insights of this latter approach, we recognise that any serious engagement with it would require the complex navigation of an alternative discourse with its own canons and relationship to religious truth. In any case, the analytic tradition (in its Christian-mediated guise) with its focus on rigorous definition and logical argument represented a more attractive initial conversation partner for taking stock of Islamic religious epistemology past and present.

In the remainder of this Introduction, we shall set out in greater detail the appropriate preliminaries to the contributions made by the fifteen chapters collected herein. We start with a broad overview of epistemological tendencies within the Islamic tradition, introducing the main groupings and approaches that will inform many of the essays in this volume. We will then turn to the Western tradition and trace some of the major perspectives in religious epistemology since the Enlightenment, which serve as the intellectual context for the dialogue that we aim to broach between the two discourses. Next, we shall undertake a more precise operation of bridging the gap between the classical Islamic tradition and the categories of contemporary analytic epistemology. Thereafter, we present a case-study

of the epistemology of a major early Islamic theologian, Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). This acts both to provide a detailed illustration of the ideas already surveyed and to present an influential and original Islamic epistemological system that will not otherwise feature in the book. Then, we shall briefly discuss recent trends in Islamic religious epistemology which, in light of what has preceded, present the current moment and its challenges. Finally, we will introduce the five parts of the book and the three chapters in each, as well as offer some general notes to aid the reader.

Epistemological Tendencies in the Islamic Tradition

Muslim scholarly (and popular) literature on the topic of knowledge is vast. Many scholars have dedicated an entire book or substantial chapter to discussing knowledge, its importance and its various forms. These works often aimed to define knowledge in terms of its religious, ethical and practical significance. Muslim scholars across the fields of Qur'an, Hadith, law, theology and more have frequently discussed knowledge in the context of its necessity for understanding and practising Islam. They have drawn on Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet Muḥammad to underscore the divine endorsement of seeking knowledge. They have also stressed the holistic integration of knowledge with belief (*īmān*) and ethical conduct (*akhlāq* or *adab*).⁴ The Islamic scriptural sources emphasise the pursuit of knowledge to strengthen one's faith. Knowledge is seen as a prerequisite for true belief, as it enables believers to understand and internalise religious teachings. In fact, the relationship between knowledge and belief is one of interdependency, since true belief cannot exist without knowledge, and knowledge is incomplete without belief. Scholarly discussions have often revolved around the degrees of certainty that could be found in different kinds of knowledge and their impact on the firmness and quality of faith. This has also led to a differentiation between mere uncritical belief (*taqlīd*) and an informed faith based on verification (*taḥqīq*) through knowledge, the latter being a result of greater epistemic exertion and grace from God.⁵

To begin to do justice to the range of discourses within the Islamic tradition aligning with the notion of 'analytic epistemology', it is important to take a broad compass. A major Islamic expression of this field is found within the discipline of *ʿilm al-kalām* (rational theology). This method of rational discourse for the defence and articulation of scriptural truths – paradigmatically practised in Arabic – was not only the mainstay of major Islamic schools, such as the Ash'arīs, Māturīdīs, Mu'tazila and the Imāmī and Zaydī Shī'a, but even found its adherents amongst Jewish and

4 Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, pp. 128–47, 196–237.

5 Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, pp. 148–61.

Christian theologians.⁶ Although often in fierce contestation with one another, the practitioners of *kalām* (*mutakallimūn*) were invested in a shared project in which they used concepts naturalised from existing philosophical discourse, such as the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic traditions, as well as emerging 'indigenous' rational investigation, to justify core beliefs of 'aqīda (creed) as knowledge. In the opening chapters of *kalām* manuals, theologians would outline the epistemological framework that would govern the development of their arguments.⁷ Hence, these chapters discuss many topics that are broadly equivalent to those within contemporary religious epistemology.

Scholars of *kalām* also elaborated on the theme of God's knowledge as part of their theological articulation of the divine nature. God's knowledge – considered absolute, eternal (or timeless) and encompassing all things past, present and future – is contrasted with human knowledge, which is limited and contingent. The doctrine of divine omniscience was thus used to emphasise human limitations and the need for intellectual humility. It led some scholars to explore the implications of God's knowledge for understanding predestination and free will – namely, how either God's knowledge does not negate human free will, as it reflects rather than determines human choice, or how it does negate free will because its operation, in tandem with the divine will, is essentially coercive.⁸

Despite the wide acknowledgement that there is an unknowable and incomprehensible aspect to God's nature, Muslim theologians have investigated how human beings can know God, focusing on the means and limits of acquiring such knowledge through reason and revelation.⁹ They proposed that knowledge of God is the highest form of knowledge and is only attainable by deeply examining the signs and portents of God in creation and ourselves. Alongside this, they often drew a distinction between knowledge of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*) and knowledge of His underlying essence or complete essential nature (*dhāt*). Some scholars deemed the former possible (albeit to a limited degree) *via* rational inference, while thinking the latter utterly beyond human comprehension.¹⁰ Scholars also discussed the role of the messengers and revealed scriptures in conveying

6 For general discussion, see Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*'. A summary of relevant groups can be found in Harvey, 'Theology, Islamic'. Details of Jewish and Christian discourses are in Ben-Shammai, 'Kalām in Medieval Jewish Philosophy', pp. 124–36, and Griffith, 'Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām', pp. 2–4.

7 For a survey of the epistemological categories and terms discussed within *kalām*, see Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology', pp. 149–51.

8 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 108–29.

9 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 129–41.

10 Shehadi, *Ghazālī's Unique and Unknowable God*, pp. 40–49, and Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 99–101.

knowledge about God inaccessible to human reason by itself. Additionally, some held that true human knowledge of God was only possible following a process of intellectual and spiritual purification. In this regard, the integration of Sufi practices to achieve a deeper, experiential knowledge of God (see below), which was famously promoted by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), became a common feature of mainstream Sunnism.¹¹

As a synthesis between scripture and a certain mode of reason (one that, it should be said in light of the present topic, emphasised evidentialism), *kalām* was criticised by those with alternative commitments. For the cluster of broadly scripturalist theologies often described as Traditionalism, the approach of *kalām* to the gamut of questions surrounding warranted belief was overly intellectualised.¹² Traditionalists were concerned with safeguarding a creedal legacy that they understood to be in line with the earliest and best generations of Muslims (the Salaf), who were the most deserving to be followed in the matter of belief. These Traditionalists, often associated with the emerging Sunnī Hadith movement to collect and verify the prophetic legacy, saw true belief as not requiring the elaborate rational argumentation of *kalām* for its justification. Its correctness was instead obvious to every person with an uncorrupted natural disposition (*fiṭra*), especially upon the encounter with the accurately transmitted and taught Islamic revealed sources. This implied that belief in God ought to be established on the firm foundations of the Qur'an, the Sunna and consensus.¹³ The result is that many expressions of this tendency developed a fideistic flavour, although more intellectually nuanced versions did exist, too.¹⁴ In turn, Traditionalism was seen by practitioners of *kalām* as unsophisticated and unable to respond to new religious challenges.¹⁵

Opposition to prevailing Sunnī *kalām* and Traditionalist epistemic accounts alike was provided within the Shī'ī tradition. Shī'ī scholars highlight the special status of the Imams, a chain of successors to the Prophet Muḥammad from within his family (*ahl al-bayt*) who are seen as divinely guided and possessing superior knowledge. Thus, in Shī'ism, religious knowledge is shaped by the teaching of the Imams, which is often held to provide a living post-prophetic source of infallible guidance. Knowledge – particularly of unseen matters – is seen as a divine gift that is imparted to the Imams to guide the community and elucidate for them complex

11 Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 94–121.

12 See Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1*, pp. 386–92.

13 Abrahamov, 'Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology', pp. 271–73.

14 For further elaboration of these two tendencies within Traditionalist religious epistemology, see Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology', pp. 156–62.

15 See Frank's discussion of the polemic between al-Ash'arī and the Ḥanbalis of his era. Frank, 'Al-Ash'arī's *Kitāb al-Ḥaṭṭh 'alā l-Baḥṭh*', pp. 103–6.

theological and legal issues; hence, Shīʿī belief places a strong emphasis on an esoteric inner dimension of knowledge possessed by the Imams that is not publicly accessible to ordinary people.¹⁶

The Muslim philosophers, or *falāsifa*, meanwhile, cleaved to a stream of merged Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy which, though shaped by its development within an Islamic milieu, did not style itself as a theological response to scriptural truth.¹⁷ Although still classifiable, like *kalām*, as a form of evidentialism,¹⁸ proponents of *falsafa* were committed to the continuation, albeit with their own new twist, of the epistemological categories and procedures of the Greek philosophical heritage (with some Iranian and Indian additions).¹⁹

Numerous Greek philosophical works were translated into Arabic as part of the 'translation movement' in the Abbasid period and had a profound influence on the subsequent development of Islamic epistemological discourse. Key pioneers of Muslim philosophy, such as al-Kindī (d. ca 259/873), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), adapted a sophisticated pre-existing lexicon and set of rational precepts to the Arabic language and Islamic public debates over knowledge.²⁰ The translation of Aristotle's works on logic (the *Organon*) and their integration into Islamic thought resulted in logic (*manṭiq*) being considered essential for acquiring and validating knowledge. Islamic philosophers saw logic as the science of correct reasoning and an essential tool to ensure the coherence and consistency of their arguments and to distinguish true knowledge from falsehood. The systematisation of logic by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, drawing heavily on Aristotle's syllogistic methods, as well as their own novel contributions, foregrounded the use of logical demonstration to attain certainty in knowledge. This philosophical epistemology was employed to support theological doctrines and indeed legal principles. Moreover, these philosophical methods were used to reconcile reason with revelation according to the premise that rational inquiry complements rather than contradicts divine revelation.²¹

16 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 142–54.

17 Frank has commented with respect to the *falāsifa*'s stance towards the 'supramundane source of prophetic inspiration' that 'they do not hold it to be a phenomenon claims of whose divine origin belong peculiarly to a realm of religious experience, language and belief that is distinct from the the universal realm of common experience, and profane language and whose rationalisation, therefore, belongs properly to theological rather than to philosophic discourse in our contemporary sense of these terms'. Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', p. 245, n. 26.

18 See Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 53, 76, 98.

19 Rudolph 'Introduction', pp. 18–21.

20 See Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture*, and Bsoul, *Translation Movement and Acculturation*.

21 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 194–239; Inati, 'Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy', and Nuseibeh, 'Epistemology', pp. 824–40.

For the Muslim *ḥakīm*, it was the *kalām* practitioner who was unsophisticated, his dialectical argumentation a bastardised version of the demonstrative scientific ideal established within philosophy.²² Postclassical *mutakallimūn* on the whole conceded the point (a normative evaluation of whether they were correct to do so is a discussion for another place) and increasingly adopted elements of the framework of *falsafa*,²³ often under the name *ḥikma* (wisdom).²⁴ Hence, to a not inconsiderable degree, study of the postclassical *kalām* tradition is simultaneously study of the later development of *falsafa*.

Finally, we can draw attention to Sufism which, though a meaningful category in its own right, often had a certain proximity to one of the preceding trends. That is, one can find *kalām*-practising, Traditionalist and ‘philosophical’ modes of Sufi thought.²⁵ The distinctive aspect of Sufism in this epistemological context was, of course, the commitment to the relevance of a form of mystical insight to ground knowledge claims. Despite a possible relationship to one of the other exoteric categories mentioned above, Sufis were distinguished by their conviction that true knowledge could only ultimately be secured by the esoteric unveiling granted to an adept on the spiritual path.²⁶

For Sufis, knowledge is seen as a divine gift that enlightens the heart, leading to a deeper understanding of God and the self. This act of illumination is not purely intellectual but brings about moral and spiritual transformation. The metaphor of knowledge as light (*nūr*) is supposed to capture its non-discursive, mystical and experiential dimension. Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), for example, describes knowledge as a light that God casts into the heart of His servants, illuminating the path to divine proximity and understanding. Before him, al-Ghazālī in many writings used the metaphor of light to explain the intuitive and immediate nature of true knowledge, which transcends rational discourse.²⁷

Sufis distinguish between rational knowledge (*‘ilm*) and experiential, mystical knowledge (*ma‘rifa*).²⁸ While rational knowledge is based on study and intellectual effort, mystical knowledge is attained through direct,

22 See van Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’, pp. 24–26.

23 For contemporary debate over the philosophical status of postclassical *kalām*, see the contention that it is ‘paraphilosophy’ by the standard of peripatetic philosophy in Gutas, ‘Avicenna and After’, and the response that there is no good reason to hold that standard as normative in Kaukua, ‘Post-Classical Islamic Philosophy – A Contradiction in Terms?’.

24 Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*, pp. 101–2.

25 Karamustafa, *Sufism*, pp. 89–90, 97, 106; Rustom, ‘Philosophical Sufism’, p. 399.

26 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 155–93.

27 Hesova, ‘The Notion of Illumination’, pp. 65–85.

28 Shah-Kazemi, ‘The Notion and Significance of Ma‘rifa’, pp. 155–81.

personal experience of the divine from the divine. The concept of *kashf* (unveiling) or *ilhām* (inspiration) is a cornerstone of Sufi epistemology, referring to the seeker's insight into divine truths that bypass rational thought.²⁹ For this reason, mystical knowledge is considered a higher form of knowledge that provides special insight into the divine reality that is superior to the rudimentary ways of knowing available through the senses or reasoning. Sufis argue that mystical knowledge is often acquired through spiritual practices such as meditation, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and asceticism. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) poetry speaks of this mystical knowledge as a form of intimacy that is only accessible through love and union with God. However, as emphasised by al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297/910), one of the architects of the classical Sufi tradition, the guidance of a spiritual master (*murshid* or *shaykh*) is crucial for a seeker or disciple (*murīd*) of the Sufi path to attain true knowledge before becoming an adept mystic or wayfarer (*sālik*). The spiritual *shaykh* provides instruction, models virtuous behaviour and helps the disciple navigate the spiritual path. The relationship between *shaykh* and disciple is based on trust and submission: the disciple follows the teachings and practices prescribed by the *shaykh* who is seen as a vessel of divine wisdom indispensable for spiritual growth.³⁰

Sufis often contrast inner, esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) with outer, exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*). While the exoteric pertains to the external aspects of religion, such as rituals and laws, the esoteric pertains to the hidden, inner meanings that can be accessed through spiritual insight and unveiling. The esoteric is thus considered superior to the exoteric because it provides deeper understanding and closer connection to the divine. True knowledge in Sufism, then, involves penetrating the surface to uncover the spiritual realities that lie beneath religious practices and texts.

Finally, Sufi teachings outline various stages and levels of knowledge that correspond to the seeker's spiritual progression. These stages include initial learning, spiritual awakening and eventual realisation of divine unity. The seeker begins with *'ilm al-yaqīn* (the knowledge of certainty), progresses through *'ayn al-yaqīn* (the 'eye' or essence of certainty) and reaches *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certainty). Each stage represents a deeper level of understanding and connection with the divine, culminating in complete unity with God's will and pleasure.³¹

29 Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, pp. 35–47, and Asvat, *Sufism: The Living Tradition*, pp. 67–81.

30 Honerkamp, 'The Ethical-Mystical Foundations', pp. 79–97.

31 Al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, pp. 381–82, and Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 118–19.

Criticism of Sufism centres on the very features that its adherents support. The focus on a privately accessed, esoteric mode of knowledge may appear to conflict with the call to a straightforward universal creed that for some is the *raison d'être* of Islam. Moreover, the idea of submission to the spiritual *shaykh* may be held to undermine the emphasis on personal epistemic autonomy that is an important theme within the rational theological tradition. A possible resolution to this tension could involve staking out distinct areas in which the various kinds of epistemic discourses operate.

With this broad outline in place, we shall shift attention to the contemporary Western tradition of religious epistemology and survey its own history and categories as a starting point for the specific analytic Islamic epistemological questions that we shall seek to raise in this book.

The Development of Religious Epistemology in the Contemporary Western Tradition

The approach taken within this volume to situate Islamic epistemology within contemporary Western religious epistemology is not necessarily an obvious or natural move, given the internal development of that discourse. For a start, this latter tradition is dominated by the Christian philosophers who are the architects of the field as we know it today – a fact that looks likely to remain. This raises a challenge for any religious tradition outside Christianity to find welcoming points of entry. Another reason is that there has been little to no engagement with Islamic epistemology (or logic, metaphysics, ethics and politics, for that matter) from other religious traditions and *vice versa*. Moreover, there has even been a relatively sparse development of Islamic epistemology as a field of inquiry on its own terms. This is suggested by the lack of substantive research monographs published in either English or any European language furthering the field.

To outline how the present volume applies ideas of Western religious epistemology to Islamic debates and intervenes in the ongoing development of the former field, it is useful to provide a brief survey of this complex domain. This task requires us to examine the following core ideas as they developed within the Western tradition: Enlightenment Evidentialism, Natural Theology, Wittgensteinian Fideism and, finally, Reformed Epistemology. Simply put, the latter three epistemological ideas can be seen as responses to the first: religious epistemology today in a sense is an ongoing debate about whether evidentialism applies to religious belief. Each of the three responses above has a distinct perspective on the nature of religious belief and its justification. Hence, through interaction with each other, these ideas shaped much of the discussions of twentieth-century Anglo-American (analytic) religious epistemology that form the

broad context and point of departure for an assessment of the relation between knowledge, faith and reason within philosophy of religion in the twenty-first century.

Enlightenment Evidentialism embodies a philosophical ethos that emerged from the intellectual ferment of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This approach to the systematisation of knowledge and belief is deeply rooted in the works of pivotal thinkers such as David Hume, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. It emphasises a rigorous grounding in reason as the cornerstone of any belief system. The central tenet of Enlightenment Evidentialism is the consistent application of reason to all beliefs. Kant's imperative 'Dare to know!' (*sapere aude*), which can be more loosely rendered as 'Have the courage to use your own understanding', encapsulates this ethos, advocating for autonomy in reasoning and scepticism about received wisdom. This philosophical stance challenges the legitimacy of beliefs based on tradition, authority, or mere sentiment, insisting instead that all beliefs must withstand the scrutiny of reason. At its core is the following claim:

$J(b) \Leftrightarrow E(b)$: 'a belief in b is justified if and only if there is evidence supporting the belief in b '.³²

A classic representation of Enlightenment Evidentialism is W. K. Clifford's essay titled 'The Ethics of Belief'; it further cemented the evidentialist framework by asserting that it is morally wrong to hold beliefs based on insufficient evidence. Clifford used a pair of narratives to illustrate this principle:

(1) The Ship Owner: Clifford narrates about a ship owner who, despite having strong evidence that his ship needed repairs, chose to believe otherwise. The ship's subsequent fate (sinking or surviving) was irrelevant to the ethical breach, which lay in believing against the weight of evidence. This story underscores the principle that belief should align strictly with the evidence available. (2) The Slanderers: in another example, a group's baseless belief in the guilt of individuals, despite readily available exculpatory evidence, illustrates the moral failings of evidential neglect. Even though the accused were eventually found guilty based on deeper investigation, the initial belief was formed unethically.³³

These narratives highlight a foundational concept in Enlightenment Evidentialism: the ethical dimension of belief wherein one has an obligation to form beliefs based on adequate and appropriate evidence. This extends

32 McCain, 'Evidence and Religious Belief', pp. 29–40.

33 Clifford, 'The Ethics of Belief', pp. 163–67; Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe*, pp. 37–50.

beyond personal ethics into the social realm, as beliefs influence actions that affect societal well-being.

Enlightenment Evidentialism critically assesses religious beliefs through this stringent evidential lens. A contention arises particularly around the belief in God, deemed unreasonable under this framework if not supported by conclusive evidence. This view shaped the evidentialist critique of religious belief as often lacking sufficient empirical or rational justification. The Evidentialist Objection to Religious Belief (in God) can be set out in the following argument:³⁴

- P1. Belief in God is rational only if there is sufficient evidence for God's existence.
- P2. There is not sufficient evidence for God's existence.
- C1. Therefore, belief in God is irrational.

This formalisation encapsulates the evidentialist challenge to theism given the concurrent emergence of a critical assessment of the arguments traditionally used to justify belief in God, such as the ontological, cosmological and teleological. Notably, thinkers such as Hume and Kant critiqued these argument types for claimed logical and empirical shortcomings. The result of this challenge arguably led in various degrees to the growth of varieties of scepticism, agnosticism and atheism, as well as forcing theists to reconfigure their relationship to evidence in religious epistemology. Hence, in response to the challenges posed by Enlightenment Evidentialism, defenders of the rationality of religious belief developed several counter-arguments, which can be classified based on which premise of the Evidentialist Objection they reject:

- Rejection of Premise 1: some argue that religious belief does not strictly require empirical evidence, suggesting that other forms of knowledge and experience might justify such beliefs.
- Rejection of Premise 2: others contend that the evidence considered insufficient by critics is, in fact, adequate, citing experiences, miracles and the success of various arguments for God as indirect but compelling evidence of divine existence.

The second important idea is Natural Theology, which represents a unique interface between the strictures of Enlightenment Evidentialism and the realm of religion, particularly in its shared insistence on the necessity of evidence for theistic belief. In effect, Natural Theology adopts the

34 Taken from Clark, 'Religious Epistemology'.

evidentialist methodology but arrives at significantly different conclusions about fundamental religious beliefs, such as the existence of God, thereby challenging a stance that tends to favour scepticism regarding theological claims. Natural Theology concurs with the fundamental principles of Enlightenment Evidentialism, which dictates that beliefs must be substantiated by reason and empirical evidence. This agreement is reflected in the commitment of natural theologians to the first premise of the evidentialist objection to God: that rational belief in God requires evidential support. However, natural theology diverges in its interpretation and application of what constitutes 'sufficient evidence', particularly in relation to divine existence. This means that natural theologians dispute the second premise of the evidentialist objection, which posits the insufficiency of evidence for God's existence. Instead, they argue that the available evidence not only supports theism but that it does so convincingly. This stance is manifested through several classical arguments that have been foundational to Natural Theology in the Western tradition such as the ontological, cosmological, teleological, axiological and historical-experiential arguments. These arguments are seen by natural theologians as fulfilling the evidential requirement laid out by Enlightenment Evidentialism and as addressing both the empirical and rational dimensions of evidence.³⁵

Natural theologians today have not remained static in their defences but have actively re-articulated and strengthened their earlier arguments in response to criticisms from evidentialist and other philosophical quarters. This dynamic engagement underscores their commitment to the evidentialist demand for robust, logically coherent and empirically supported arguments. They aim not only to counteract atheistic interpretations of the same evidence but also to demonstrate that theism can be a rationally held position based on the available evidence.³⁶ The approach of Natural Theology illustrates a critical engagement with Enlightenment principles, adapting its rigorous demands for evidence to support metaphysical and supernatural claims. This adaptation shows that the debate between sceptical evidentialists and natural theologians is fundamentally about the interpretation and sufficiency of evidence rather than methodology *per se*. Natural theologians assert that the evidence not only allows for belief in God but, when properly understood, actively supports such belief. Thus, Natural Theology, in its dialogue with Enlightenment Evidentialism, highlights a vital aspect of contemporary religious epistemology: that evidential demands can be met in the context of religious belief, albeit through

35 See Baker-Hytch, 'Natural Theology', pp. 13–28.

36 See the articles in Craig and Moreland (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*; Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*; and Ruloff and Horban (eds), *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology*.

complex philosophical arguments. Natural Theology has thus contributed to the development of contemporary religious epistemology by opening epistemic space for theistic beliefs and showing that they can emerge intact from the demands of sceptical evidentialism.

Next in line for analysis is Wittgensteinian Fideism, a stance that provides a stark contrast to Enlightenment Evidentialism and its derivatives. This philosophical stance, influenced heavily by Ludwig Wittgenstein's theories of language and meaning, approaches religious language and belief through a lens that diverges significantly from the empirical and rational criteria emphasised by evidentialism.³⁷ Wittgenstein's 'language games' theory posits that meaning in language arises from its use within specific life contexts or 'forms of life'. Each form of life has its own rules that govern the meaning and use of language, which are not universally applicable but context-dependent.³⁸ This perspective fundamentally challenged the Logical Positivists' assertion that language must be either analytically true/false or empirically verifiable to be meaningful.³⁹ Enlightenment Evidentialism, as discussed, insists on complete empirical or logical justification for beliefs. Wittgensteinian Fideism diverges from this by asserting that religious beliefs are part of a distinct language game with its own internal logic and criteria for meaning and truth. This approach suggests that the criteria set by evidentialism are not only inappropriate but irrelevant for assessing religious beliefs, which are deeply embedded in non-empirical, normative and existential dimensions of human life. Key aspects of Wittgensteinian Fideism include, firstly, that religious language is autonomous and governed by its own rules within a religious form of life. This insulates religious beliefs from external epistemological critiques that do not share the same foundational assumptions. Secondly, fideism holds that religious language does not compete with scientific or empirical language because they operate in fundamentally different domains. Religious statements are not deficient versions of empirical claims but operate under a different logic that does not conform to empirical verification. Thirdly, religious language is primarily expressive and participative, reflecting and reinforcing the communal practices and shared beliefs of a religious community. Understanding and engaging with religious language thus requires participation in its specific form of life.⁴⁰

37 It is debatable whether the position referred to as 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' (first coined by Kai Nielsen in 1967) with its subsequent characterisation and application to discussions around religious belief and religious language is what Wittgenstein himself would have endorsed. See Amesbury, 'Fideism', and Carroll, *Wittgenstein within the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 101–22.

38 Kishik, *Wittgenstein's Form of Life*.

39 Creath, 'Logical Positivism'.

40 Amesbury, 'Fideism'; Forrest, 'The Epistemology of Religion'.

While Natural Theology attempts to engage with evidentialist demands by providing rational and empirical support for religious beliefs (thus accepting the evidentialist premise that belief in God requires evidence), Wittgensteinian Fideism rejects this premise outright. It argues that the criteria for meaningful and justified belief in a religious context are not susceptible to the same standards used in natural science or empirical inquiry. An implication of this, of course, is that it introduces a relativistic element to religious epistemology, suggesting that what counts as a justified belief is relative to the language game one is playing. The stance challenges the universal applicability of Enlightenment Evidentialism, proposing instead that different domains of human experience (such as religion) may legitimately operate according to their own epistemological standards. This not only broadens the scope of what can be considered rational but also emphasises the diversity of human cognitive and cultural practices. Wittgensteinian Fideism therefore provided a critique of sorts, as well as an alternative to Enlightenment Evidentialism, by redefining the boundaries of meaningful and justified belief. It shifted the focus from universal evidential standards to the contextual, rule-governed practices of language games. In doing so, it offered a way to view religious beliefs as deeply rational within their own contexts, even if they do not conform to the strict empirical standards set by evidentialism. This perspective fostered a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of knowledge and belief, recognising the legitimacy of diverse forms of life and the ways in which they shape human understanding.

The final idea to be examined is Reformed Epistemology, a stance that represents a sophisticated philosophical challenge to Enlightenment Evidentialism, specifically questioning the requirement that all beliefs, including belief in God, must be founded on argumentative and empirical evidence.⁴¹ Pioneered by the philosophers Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston, Reformed Epistemology (also known as Proper Functionalism) argues against the classical foundationalist view that a non-inferential or 'properly basic' belief must be either rationally self-evident or evident to the senses and indubitable to be rationally accepted.⁴² This latter perspective,

41 Bergmann, 'Reformed Epistemology', pp. 41–55.

42 Reformed Epistemology emerged in the early 1980s, significantly shaped by both the Reformed theological tradition and developments within general epistemology. It was notably articulated in the collection *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, both of whom drew inspiration from Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper. Central to their argument is Plantinga's adoption of Calvin's idea that humans possess an innate *sensus divinitatis* or sense of the divine, which naturally inclines them toward theistic beliefs.

embedded in Enlightenment Evidentialism, is seen as too restrictive and not reflective of how humans actually form and justify their beliefs. Reformed Epistemology proposes to broaden the spectrum of basic beliefs to include those that are not necessarily supported by arguments or evidence but are still rationally held because they are foundational to human experience, such as beliefs about other minds, the external world and even God. Reformed Epistemology thus challenges the demarcation used by evidentialists between basic and non-basic beliefs, reclassifying the belief in God as properly basic and hence rational without inferential support.

One of the potent critiques made within Reformed Epistemology is that evidentialism, when applied consistently, undermines itself. If all beliefs must be supported by evidence, then the very rules of evidentialism would need justification by evidence, which cannot be adequately supplied. Moreover, the universal demand for evidence cannot be met consistently without falling into scepticism about many ordinary beliefs (such as beliefs about the past and other minds, and so on) that we typically take for granted. By demonstrating that these everyday beliefs would fail the evidentialist test, Reformed Epistemology seeks to reveal an inconsistency in the evidentialist framework, arguing that it is self-defeating and untenable as a universal standard.

When proponents of Reformed Epistemology advocate that belief in God does not require evidential justification, they argue for the propriety of these beliefs based on their functionality within a person's noetic structure – the interconnected web of a person's beliefs. This approach leans towards an externalist view of epistemology, where the justification of a belief hinges more on the reliability of the process through which the belief is formed, rather than on evidential support accessible to introspection.⁴³ The shift towards externalism in Reformed Epistemology highlights the importance of the conditions under which beliefs are formed.

This perspective challenges the necessity of evidential support for theistic belief, positing instead that such beliefs can be properly basic and justified independently of empirical evidence. While its foundational ideas resonate with Reformed theology, Reformed Epistemology's principles are adaptable across various Christian traditions and potentially other monotheistic religions, suggesting a broader applicability than its Christian origins might imply. Additionally, influences from epistemologists such as Thomas Reid, who emphasised the role of innate belief-forming faculties, have also been pivotal. Reid argued that some belief dispositions are inherent and, while they cannot be entirely justified through rational processes, they are nonetheless crucial for understanding the rationality of religious beliefs. This blend of theological insights and epistemological theories underpinning Reformed Epistemology mark it as a distinct approach that views religious beliefs as rational and rooted in the specific cognitive dispositions with which humans are endowed. See Bolos and Scott, 'Reformed Epistemology'.

43 McNabb, *Religious Epistemology*, pp. 1–3.

If a belief is produced under conditions that are generally reliable, then the belief can be considered justified. This marks a significant departure from the internalist approaches typical of evidentialism, which focus on the justifiability of beliefs based on evidence perceptible or intelligible to the believer.

Reformed Epistemology, then, provides its own robust alternative to Enlightenment Evidentialism by challenging its foundational premises and proposing a more permissive framework for understanding what it means for a belief to be justified. By expanding the scope of what counts as a basic belief and critiquing the self-defeating nature of strict evidentialist criteria, this approach arguably offers a distinctive way to reconcile rational belief in God with a rigorous epistemological framework. This has not only enriched the philosophical discourse around belief and justification but has also reassured those holding religious beliefs that their faith need not be at odds with rationality.

Building on the above categories, we shall now introduce a more fine-grained epistemological classification for questions surrounding the justification of belief, which is the volume's central motif. By mapping the positions of certain key Islamic schools and figures in analytic terms, we shall begin to establish the specific intellectual contexts in which the contributions to this volume make their interventions.

Justification of Beliefs between Analytic Epistemology and Islamic Theology

In bridging the discourses of analytic epistemology and Islamic theology, it is useful to focus on a specific theme. The one that best fits the present exercise is that of justification: what must be connected to empirical beliefs, such as those asserted within Islamic theology, for them to be justified.⁴⁴ Next, for any Islamic perspective to engage prevailing contemporary discussions in religious epistemology, there must be mutual intelligibility between parties. In order to establish this, it is important to define precisely the terms of the engagement. For the sake of framing

44 The beliefs important for Islamic thought, most significantly the existence of God and the messengerhood of the Prophet Muhammad (and those beliefs derived from them), are usually understood as what are termed empirical beliefs in contemporary epistemology. That is, their warrant is derived from premises drawn from experience and not reason or inspiration alone. See BonJour, 'A Version of Internalist Foundationalism', pp. 5–6. This does not necessarily imply that the beliefs in question are initially formed based on arguments, although there may be areas in which theoretical investigations of branch matters (*furū*) explicate what should be believed. See Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', 232.

the following treatment of the Islamic tradition, we shall draw some common distinctions from contemporary epistemology with the following questions:⁴⁵

1. To what extent does the justification of empirical beliefs require internal access to relevant evidence?
2. To what extent does the justification of empirical beliefs require individual access to evidence?
3. What is the noetic structure by which the justification of beliefs is arranged?
4. What kinds of beliefs count as non-inferential, and what is their justificatory strength?

Question (1) concerns the debate between positions termed externalism and internalism. A basic shared presumption is that every justified true belief requires a secure link to its object of knowledge. For example, for the belief that God exists to be justified and true, the concept of God must connect to the deity's actual existence.⁴⁶ Externalism can be understood as the position that this link to the object of knowledge is not just necessary but sufficient for warrant. The most famous example is the Proper Functionalism (or Reformed Epistemology) articulated by Alvin Plantinga, in which the belief that God exists is warranted even in the absence of any access to evidence due to the faculties with which the human being has been endowed.⁴⁷ An externalist in this sense will not necessarily think that human beings lack internal access to evidence, just that they need not. Internalism is the position that warrant also requires complete access, in principle, to all relevant evidence by epistemic agents.

Classical-era theologians from the Sunnī *kalām* schools of the Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs, as well as the Mu'tazilīs (whose positions were adopted by many Shī'īs)⁴⁸ were invariably internalists. They understood religious beliefs, such as the existence of God, to receive justification from the evidence provided by rationally and scripturally based theological

45 This framework mainly reflects the individualistic emphasis of epistemology prior to its more recent 'social turn'. See O'Connor *et al.*, 'Social Epistemology'. Although it is necessary for Islamic theology to also reckon with this development, it should not be at the expense of addressing these basic questions.

46 There is a great deal that can be said about the definition and reference of the concept of God, as well as of existence. See Klima, 'The "Grammar" of "God" and "Being"'. There is also the post-Heidegger contention that such an 'ontotheological' understanding of God is, in effect, idolatrous. See Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 39–41.

47 McNabb, 'Proper Functionalism', pp. 108–9.

48 See, for instance, Abdulsater, *Shi'i Doctrine, Mu'tazili Theology*, p. 2.

arguments. Such arguments, with which they filled their treatises, were intended as reproducible by audiences to engender the warrant claimed by their authors. An example from the Ash'arī tradition is Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) who writes: 'Sound inquiry, when pursued with full effort, and in the absence of a deficiency alongside it, furnishes rational certainty in affirming knowledge of that which is inquired about'.⁴⁹ In the Māturīdī tradition, the example can be given of the Bukharan scholar Abū Ishāq al-Ṣaffār (d. 534/1139) who uses variants of the phrase 'the evidence that furnishes certainty' as the keynote to the epistemological introduction to his book.⁵⁰ Likewise, in the text ascribed to Mānkdim Shashdīw (d. 425/1034), a notable Mu'tazilī Zaydī theologian, there is mention of 'inquiry into evidences to arrive by them to knowledge'.⁵¹ Anthony Booth has argued that in the case of the Mu'tazila (and with the caveat expressed in (2) below, the same is true for the other *kalām* schools) this amounts to evidentialism: 'a subject *S*'s belief that *p* is justified iff *S* has sufficient evidence that *p*'.⁵² For those Muslim scholars today who continue to work within the rational legacy bequeathed by the mainstream classical and postclassical *kalām* discourse, a strong commitment to internalism remains central to their stance. This is the case even if the nature of that evidence can in some circumstances be 'pared down' to the reception of mass-transmitted reports of the Prophet Muḥammad and his miracles (along with sufficient rational argumentation to establish their evidentiary force), as discussed by Aaron Spevack in his chapter in this volume.

Externalist theorists are much thinner on the ground, albeit not entirely absent.⁵³ For instance, it has been argued that the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) is an externalist (of the Plantingian proper functionalist kind), because he holds that the human being has been created with a natural disposition (*fiṭra*)⁵⁴ which triggers warranted belief in God in the presence of divine 'signs' in the world without the need to reason from

49 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Irshād*, p. 61. Al-Juwaynī is a central figure in the chapters by Hannah Erlwein and Laura Hassan in Part II of this volume.

50 Al-Ṣaffār, *Talkhīṣ al-adilla*, vol. 1, pp. 28–38.

51 Al-Hamadhānī, *Sharh al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, p. 45. Note that this text was published under the name of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025), the author of the commentary on which it is the *ta'līq* (supercommentary).

52 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 9. This is equivalent to the formulation in the previous section.

53 The qualification 'theorists' is important as it could be argued that members of the notable and widespread tendency of non-*kalām* Traditionalism implicitly adopt an externalist position.

54 On Ibn Taymiyya's treatment of the *fiṭra*, see El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, pp. 260–64.

evidence.⁵⁵ Another externalist who appears in this volume is the modern Shī'ī theologian Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (d. 1365/1946) who, as discussed by Amir Mohammad Emami, independently developed a model remarkably similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya. The debate over the 'basicity' of Islamic belief and how that plays out against parallel Christian claims has been a vibrant area of recent discussion, as can be seen in Part IV of this book.

Question (2) is only a consideration for internalists: the distinction between individual *versus* communal access to evidence is arguably only significant when it is granted that internal access is needed in the first place. On this question, we can distinguish between 'strong' evidentialism that requires every individual to possess internal justificatory evidence and Sensible Evidentialism that only needs there to be an appropriate relationship of community between the individual and others who do possess it.⁵⁶ For example, in this view, a person's belief in the existence of astronomical black holes may be warranted without possessing any evidence, as long as they can in principle reliably consult the work of relevant experts.⁵⁷

In *kalām*, these ideas relate to the well-known divergence in opinion over 'following traditional authority in the matter of belief' (*al-taqlīd fī al-īmān*). In general, whereas the Mu'tazila and some of the Ash'arī school required individual possession of evidence for the validation of faith, other Ash'arīs and the Māturīdīs validated the belief of the common believer who lacks this evidence when it was possessed by scholars.⁵⁸ In this case, the evidence possessed by such experts acts as an internalist warrant for the common people. Nevertheless, both approaches were castigated on grounds of elitism by Ibn Taymiyya.⁵⁹

55 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', pp. 775–83. Turner's account is developed and defended in his chapter in Part IV of this volume. Safaruk Chowdhury, while noting the similarities between Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology and Plantinga's Proper Functionalism, has argued for the distinctiveness of the former's approach, especially in terms of his presuppositionalism. See Chowdhury, 'Ibn Taymiyya's Fīṭralism and Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology: A Comparison and Analysis'.

56 Wykstra, 'Externalism, Proper Inferentiality and Sensible Evidentialism', p. 110. Here there may be questions asked about how such a relation should be specified. If the connection is too weak – for example, if it was to co-religionists who live in another country and do not speak the same language – it seems that there may not be a significant difference from externalism.

57 We may want to stipulate that, even in Sensible Evidentialism, part of what it is to believe in astronomical black holes is to know, even in a vague way, that knowledge about them emerges from the scientific community. But this would not seem to be a requirement, so long as the person possessing such a belief can in principle trace it back to scientists who possess evidence for it, as opposed to belief in a daily horoscope, for instance.

58 Al-Bazdawī, 'Uṣūl al-dīn', pp. 152–53; al-Juwaynī, *Al-Irshād*, pp. 57, 64. For further discussion of various nuanced later positions, see Spevack, 'Continuing Conversations', and El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 173–214.

59 Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought*, pp. 214–19.

Question (3) looks at the justificatory structure between beliefs. Foundationalism, in the debate over epistemological justification,⁶⁰ asserts that at least some beliefs held by an epistemic agent are non-inferential, such that they are not arrived at by virtue of inference from, or in their relation to, other beliefs. They are thus termed basic beliefs. In contemporary discussion (albeit not necessarily in premodern thought), any beliefs that are held on *a priori* grounds – for instance, that the Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC) is true – are often excluded from consideration. The debate turns, therefore, on empirical beliefs arising from perception of the world in some way. A long-standing motivation for foundationalism is a regress argument that justification becomes impossible if it does not reach back to individual beliefs that are not justified by other beliefs.⁶¹ They are taken, therefore, as furnishing the human being with basic knowledge on which further reasoning can be securely grounded. This argument, however, leads to a strong case that foundationalism is only viable if basic beliefs have a certain minimum amount of independent ‘justificatory strength’ – see (4), below.

The main alternative to foundationalism in terms of noetic structure is coherentism, a theory in which the warrant of beliefs is derived from their place within a larger system that is collectively justified. Instead of granting any individual belief a self-justifying status, coherentism is committed to the idea that justification always requires the coherence of that belief with others.⁶²

Foundationalism and coherentism can both be applied in principle to internalism and externalism. In the former case, this is unproblematic: the varieties of internalism and externalism discussed under (1) are paradigmatically foundationalist. A problem arises in the latter case, however. It would seem that, for coherentism to be meaningful, an epistemic agent would need cognitive access to the evidence that a given belief coheres with their existing system of beliefs. Externalism thus may appear to undercut the motivation for coherentism, which is premised not on the basicity of beliefs, but on the good fit between them.⁶³ Hence, arguably the best

60 An important theme in contemporary philosophy is whether there are basic grounding truths or realities to be discovered by the investigation of knowledge claims. Foundationalism about truth is the position that such grounds do exist and should be distinguished from the separate question, discussed here, of whether and to what extent a foundationalist structure is necessary for epistemic justification. Despite some debate over the matter, it seems plausible that the former position is core to the viable ongoing activity of philosophy; see Cahoon, *The Ends of Philosophy*, pp. 42–44. Moreover, such a stance is a minimal commitment for the kinds of questions in conversation with the Islamic tradition addressed in this book.

61 See Hasan and Fumerton, ‘Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification’.

62 See Elgin, ‘Non-Foundationalist Epistemology’, pp. 244–46.

63 Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 101–2.

versions of coherentism propose that beliefs receive justification from their ongoing place within an epistemic structure on the basis of evidence.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, every major epistemological theory within the Islamic theological tradition has been foundationalist if that label is interpreted in the above minimal terms, and none of the contributors to the present volume attempts here to advance a coherentist alternative.⁶⁵

Question (4) considers the nature and ‘justificatory strength’ of the non-inferential, or basic, beliefs that are held to exist under different versions of foundationalism, as defined in (3). The dominant *kalām* approach is what can be called a variety of traditional foundationalism. This takes basic beliefs to either be furnished by one’s external senses or one’s reason in the form of immediate, or necessary, knowledge.⁶⁶ There is also an important third category of testimonial knowledge, under which come the beliefs that arise through engagement with scripture and ultimately prophetic revelation. This is sometimes understood to be the product of inference (*muktasab*) in its entirety, although when it is the product of mass transmission (*tawātur*), it is often held to be non-inferential (*ḍarūrī*).⁶⁷ Prophetic revelation, which is vouchsafed as an epistemic source through the public performance of miracles, is near universally accepted within Islamic thought. The Sufi claim to special religious knowledge through spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) or mystical unveiling (*kashf*) is treated more ambivalently. Some currents of thought take this as a supra-rational source that can trump the limited capacities of human reason. Others, even if they do not deny the possibility of this mode of knowledge outright, argue that it is not suitable for the kind of religious knowledge with binding social implications which is the primary subject of debate.⁶⁸

64 The invocation of evidence for a coherentist theory may appear strange, as one of the most famous objections to it, the ‘isolation objection’, invokes the idea of it being a self-consistent structure without reference to the outside world. See Olsson, ‘Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification’. But arguably, in any plausible coherentist view, experiential feedback maintains reliable beliefs.

65 For a recent attempt to put forward a model of coherentism, which is compatible with, albeit not exclusive to, Islamic thought, see Harvey, ‘Lifeworld Coherentism and Tradition-Based Perspectivalism’.

66 Houtenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga*, pp. 181–82.

67 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-aqīda al-Nasafiyya*, pp. 21–22. See Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty*, pp. 13–17. It is important to bear in mind that what is in question is the justificatory dependence of these testimonial beliefs on the warrant-giving power of sense and reason-derived beliefs, not the fact that any testimony requires certain sensory and rational preconditions. For a detailed study of the Islamic concept of mass transmission, see Laher, *Tawātur in Islamic Thought*.

68 See Harvey, ‘Islamic Theology and the Crisis of Contemporary Science’, pp. 408–10, 417–18, nn. 42–43.

The model of traditional foundationalism can be termed a ‘strong’ foundationalism insofar as the senses and reason (in the normal case that they are not impaired) form beliefs that are individually incorrigible: suitable not merely for warrant, but for certain justification.⁶⁹ If one were to reduce the justificatory strength of the basic beliefs so that each still individually provides justification, yet not incorrigibly, then this would be a form of moderate foundationalism.⁷⁰ If their justificatory strength was to drop yet further, such that multiple basic beliefs were required together to reach warrant, this would be weak foundationalism, which in requiring other non-inferential beliefs for justification begins to come close to a kind of coherentism.⁷¹

As with (3), there seems little point in listing schools of thought within Islamic theology for (4) because, again, a single perspective dominated: strong foundationalism. Nevertheless, some scholars did diverge from this model in interesting ways. In the next section, we shall present the ideas of the major early theologian Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī as an example of such an alternative approach.

Case-Study: Al-Māturīdī and the Basicity of Tradition

Al-Māturīdī has a distinguished historical status in Islamic theological discourse. His theological summa, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, is acknowledged as the earliest such text extant.⁷² Even more significant in the present context is that he begins his book with sustained original epistemological theorising, setting a very influential precedent for Sunnī frameworks, especially the tradition bearing his name.⁷³ The present case-study, then, provides a fitting focused introduction into early Muslim epistemological thought, marking a point of departure for the themes tackled in this volume. Moreover, his model occupies an interesting place within the broader matrix of Islamic religious epistemology, staking out a distinctive position that otherwise would not be covered by the set of chapters that we have collected.

69 BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 26–27.

70 BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 21–22.

71 This position is not coherentism because it maintains a two-tier distinction in which inferential beliefs can receive their warrant from basic beliefs, but not vice versa. But given that, like coherentism, it holds that warrant can only be derived based on the relationship between beliefs (since basic beliefs are too weak on their own), there is arguably little reason to continue to maintain the two-tier distinction. After all, this distinction was initially premised on the idea that there was a difference-making ‘self-justicatory strength’ to basic beliefs.

72 Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, Volume 4, p. 805.

73 Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp. 74–79.

The initial introduction to *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* explores how to find truth among various religions and sects, as well as the necessity of an interplay between tradition and reason to achieve this. It is followed by a treatment of valid and invalid epistemological sources in which al-Māturīdī settles on a tripartite means to the kind of publicly verifiable knowledge addressed by *kalām* in terms of perception, reports and rational inquiry. At the same time, he rules out a number of purported sources for use in debate between the above-mentioned groups.⁷⁴ Significantly, he rejects spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) for this function, though not in absolute terms.⁷⁵ His discussion of the acceptable sources for epistemology are astute and proved extremely influential on the *kalām* manuals and creedal texts that followed within Sunnism (the ‘three source’ scheme became so pervasive that we have chosen to use it to structure Part II of this volume). Going beyond al-Māturīdī’s legacy as school eponym, the question arises as to whether his own epistemological system is identical to that adopted by later Māturīdis. The argument we shall pursue is that, according to the reconstruction presented here, certain differences can be observed in his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* that provide a contrast to the dominant strong foundationalism of *kalām* due to his approach to the basicality of tradition.

With respect to question (1), al-Māturīdī’s epistemology is in the same family of evidentialism as discussed above. He affirms internalism, writing that the need for the truth amid competing religious beliefs is warranted *via* ‘rational proof by which the truthfulness of [a given authority’s] claims is known (*ḥujjat ‘aql yu‘lamu [bi-hā] ṣidquhu fī-mā yudda‘ā*)’.⁷⁶ The situation is more complex for (2). His discussion in this opening section of his book shows an awareness of the social dynamics of knowledge and implies that he thinks uncritical following (*taqlīd*) among the masses is, in general, unavoidable.⁷⁷ He acknowledges that each group has ‘predecessors who are followed (*kullan minhum lahu salaf yuqallad*)’.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he remarks that such following is not sufficient by itself, as one’s opponents in religion are able to draw on their own authorities and ‘everyone should

74 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 65–74. For an overall characterisation of the approach, see Rudolph, ‘Ratio und Überlieferung in der Erkenntnislehre al-Ash‘arī’s und al-Māturīdī’s’, pp. 79–84. For more on these sources, see Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp. 91–101; Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 19–27.

75 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 69. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 19–20.

76 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 66.

77 This aligns with the social context of Samarqand in the tenth century. The general language of speech and administration was Persian; Arabic, in which Islamic scholarly works were written, was only understood by an intellectual elite. See Frye, ‘The Sāmānids’, p. 146.

78 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 65.

know the reality about the religion that he adopts (*wa-ʿalā kull wāḥid minhum maʿrifat al-ḥaqq fī-mā yadīnu huwa bihi*).⁷⁹ How can these two aspects be reconciled? It seems that what al-Māturīdī is pointing towards is that the problem of religious disagreement only emerges if there is no proper link between the uncritical follower's belief and the religious authority who possesses proof able to vindicate that belief against its rivals.⁸⁰ He thinks, however, that membership of the tradition itself provides such a link as well as various other tools needed for the proper exercise of one's individual epistemic capacities.⁸¹ This position of Sensible Evidentialism leaves the full internalist rational justification of the truth a task for specialists.⁸² Even though suitable evidence must be ultimately available upon encountering a rival with conflicting beliefs, the full process of evidential inference is not a requirement for each member of the community.⁸³ This position balances the evidentialist presumption that warrant requires evidential vindication with a degree of pragmatism in applying this idea to large populations of believers who lack the training to engage in sophisticated *kalām* argumentation.

So far, this kind of internalist and Sensible Evidentialist position is fairly standard within the Māturīdī and some aspects of the Ashʿarī *kalām* tradition. Where then is its distinctiveness located? It is not his response to (3), which we have characterised as a minimal commitment to a foundationalist structure of justification. Al-Māturīdī straightforwardly holds that the unimpaired senses, for example, justify certain relevant beliefs,⁸⁴ and there is no suggestion that he is a coherentist. The difference, therefore, comes in response to (4), with his idea of tradition (*samʿ*) as an unavoidable non-inferential and corrigible source of beliefs within one's epistemic structure.⁸⁵

Before crystallising what such a position amounts to in contemporary epistemological terms, it is useful to provide some further textual support. Al-Māturīdī uses the term *samʿ* in at least three ways. First, tradition in the

79 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 65.

80 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 66. This may refer to a prophet, and specifically the Prophet Muhammad, although this is not specified in the body of the text itself.

81 For further reflection on this point, see John Greco's characterisation of 'vulnerable' epistemic dependency in his chapter within this volume.

82 Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 16–17.

83 See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, vol. 1, p. 25.

84 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 70, 223.

85 In a previous work, Ramon Harvey has written of al-Māturīdī's 'non-foundationalism'. The intent of this expression, as can be seen from the content and context of its deployment, was that al-Māturīdī's 'tradition basicism' (see below) is distinct from standard *kalām* strong foundationalism. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 12, 16, 20, 28. The present treatment, then, is a clarification and development of this prior point, not a repudiation of it.

sense of knowledge conveyed through one's social situatedness is a backdrop to the intellectual lives of human beings. Although reason remains crucial for evidentially settling the debates between religions, its exercise always takes place within one's particular grounding in tradition in this general sense. Thus, he writes:

As for tradition, there is no avoiding the human being taking it as a way [or a school of thought] (*madhhab*), relying upon it and calling others to it, so that sophists share that with those who profess the existence of things and verify their reality. On this basis proceed the politics of worldly kings who all conduct themselves according to their mutual competition in seeking settlement of their affairs based on it and uniting the hearts of their subjects with it. The same is true for the person who calls to the prophetic message and to wisdom, as well as the person who organises the different kinds of professions.⁸⁶

This statement shows that al-Māturīdī sees tradition as an ineliminable part of human life and that including it within his epistemology is just to treat that life in a realistic way. One always works from within a framework of thought that is informed by the ideas of one's forbears, whether that means the reuse of the famous arguments of epistemological sceptics or the rebuttals of their opponents. If this is the case, however, then arguably one does not solely seek warrant for one's beliefs through chains of inference grounded in self-evident beliefs but advances rational justification within the epistemic context of the understandings and practices of tradition as such.⁸⁷

When moving beyond these theoretical considerations at the start of his book, al-Māturīdī explicitly invokes tradition to provide warrant to his positions. Here, he uses it in a sense somewhat narrowed from the earlier conception, in which he appeals to rightly guided tradition that ultimately has a divine source, albeit not exclusively within the dispensation revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. For instance, the first indication that he supplies to justify the belief that the originator of the world is one, and not more, is tradition. He writes: 'As for tradition, [the indication] is the agreement of doctrine [that is, by religions and sects] – despite their differences – on the One'.⁸⁸ In other words, monotheism is such a shared point

86 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 66–67.

87 Hence, for example, al-Māturīdī holds the singularly narrated report (*khābar al-wāḥid*) to be apparent (*ẓāhir*) and to thereby gain acceptability 'within the tradition in which it is encompassed' (*fī al-sam' alladhī qad uḥīṭa*); al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 72.

88 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 85. Al-Māturīdī's use of the term 'the One (*al-wāḥid*)' for God reflects his acknowledgement of the Neoplatonic *falāsifa* as important interlocutors who nevertheless are united on this point (in name, if not in theological interpretation).

of tradition that its justification is not even needed in many discursive contexts. In a similar way, al-Māturīdī argues that tradition, taken in a sense to include what has come directly from God, as well as ‘those who [God] has allowed to be followed’, does not affirm calling God a body.⁸⁹ Again, when beginning to discuss the divine attributes, he provides a tradition-based justification for the attribution and naming of God with active participles, such as powerful (*qādir*) and knowing (*‘ālim*). He writes: ‘Tradition is what is brought by the Qur’an and the rest of God’s Books, and [God] is named by what was mentioned by the messengers and all of the creation, except a people who applied these names to other than Him, thinking that affirming the name was to make a likeness between him and every named thing’.⁹⁰ Here tradition is still understood broadly: not just as the content of the Qur’an, but of all revealed scripture; and, by implication, not just the words of the messengers, but their followers. When discussing the creation and natures of things, al-Māturīdī says: ‘One must resort to tradition. In this, the reports of the People of Monotheism are the most reliable source of knowledge because they have veracious proofs’.⁹¹ Despite favouring the reports of his own group, it is clear that tradition is a wider category than solely the Islamic revelation. Also, when discussing if judgement can be suspended on whether divine speech is a creation or not, al-Māturīdī comments: ‘This is far from the truth on account of there being no escape from travelling on a path of traditional authority (*madhhab al-taqlīd*) and most of the people reject that [suspension of judgement]’.⁹² Finally, there are places, especially in the chapters in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* on human action, major sins and belief – parts that reflect al-Māturīdī’s presentation of the ‘older’ Ḥanafī theological legacy⁹³ – in which tradition refers specifically to evidence from the Qur’an, Sunna and common Muslim understanding.⁹⁴

At this juncture it is necessary to clarify the epistemic status of revelation transmitted as tradition, especially when that is done through mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) testimony, as is the case for the Qur’an. This aspect of tradition is considered by al-Māturīdī to be certain, since it comes from a certainly reliable witness (the Prophet Muḥammad) and *via* so many subsequent narrators that it is inconceivable that they could

89 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 103.

90 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 108. This seems to be a subtle criticism of Neoplatonic philosophy, as adopted by the Ismāʿīlīs, which applied the divine names to the First Intellect. He is elsewhere open in criticising ‘the Bāṭinīs’ in these terms (pp. 161–63). Also see De Smet, ‘Ismāʿīlī Theology’, p. 317.

91 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 219.

92 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 122.

93 See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, pp. 216–17.

94 See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 302, 305–6, 315–16, 344–45 and 471.

collude on a lie.⁹⁵ Yet, from al-Māturīdī's treatment it is clear that he thinks the belief in the Qur'an's certainty as a source, and its subsequent use in theological arguments, is inferential. It relies on rational consideration of the proof for the Prophet's truthfulness, as well as reflection on the number of channels through which the text has been received. Therefore, there is an important distinction between the general non-inferential sense in which a Muslim may encounter a statement of the Qur'an as part of the background of tradition and the inferential sense in which it becomes, upon rational reflection, a mass-transmitted report (*khābar*) in the context of discursive argument.⁹⁶

What emerges from the first two of al-Māturīdī's three usages of the concept of tradition is a kind of meta-epistemological discourse that is distinct from his account of the nature and function of the three standard epistemological sources of perception, rational inquiry and reports (which includes his third usage). This kind of meta-theory can act to regulate justificatory activity within certain dialectical contexts by allowing appeal to tradition as a valuable, albeit corrigible, non-inferential epistemic source. It recognises, as does Sensible Evidentialism, that an inferential case for warrant, even one that relies on strong empirically and rationally grounded beliefs as premises, also makes use of general principles and inference methods that are not themselves included in those empirical or rational premises.⁹⁷

It is now possible to provide a more precise answer to (4) above according to al-Māturīdī's epistemology. The category of tradition must include a number of non-inferential beliefs within the epistemic agent's noetic structure. For al-Māturīdī, these 'traditional' beliefs join those arising from sense perception and reason as the basic sources from which one can derive inferential knowledge. But unlike these other two sources, the beliefs of tradition cannot be taken as certain. Rather, taken as a whole, they are open to revision. It is the very fact that they are so open that, according to al-Māturīdī's account, explains why differing traditions disagree on truth in the first place, given their presumably similar perceptual and rational faculties. This unavoidable basicity of tradition within al-Māturīdī's epistemology has the consequence of avoiding strong foundationalism. In moving from the immediate beliefs prompted by the senses and reason to infer other empirical beliefs, tradition always comes into play, whether explicitly invoked or not. Hence, the strong foundationalist strategy of ensuring incorrigible inputs, certain rational inference methods

95 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 71–72.

96 See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 21–25.

97 See Wykstra, 'Externalism, Proper Inferentiality and Sensible Evidentialism', pp. 117–18.

(for instance, deduction), which then lead to demonstrably certain conclusions, is undercut.⁹⁸

To put al-Māturīdī's approach into a wider historical context, we can appreciate that the word he uses for tradition, *sam'* (literally, 'that which is heard'), recalls to some degree Aristotle's use of the term *doxa* for received opinion as the basis for dialectical, rather than demonstrative, syllogisms.⁹⁹ Al-Māturīdī is a dialectician *par excellence* and, like others from his era of *kalām*, is happy to agree with his interlocutor on an accepted premise in order to advance justificatory arguments for his beliefs, a procedure that became increasingly disliked in later periods as *kalām* was remodelled to resemble the Avicennan philosophical paradigm. That is not to say that al-Māturīdī thinks that one is unable to reach knowledge (*ilm*) or true justified belief, which is free of doubt: *episteme*. He just thinks that the route to that destination passes through tradition and the defeat of those possessing rival philosophical and theological views.

Finally, it is possible to reflect on some of the advantages that may accrue from what might appear to be a less epistemically rigorous system. First, it may be a more realistic approach to how epistemic activity occurs in human social life, making it more open to the insights of social epistemology. Second, it may be more robust and adaptable to social change, since it explicitly allows for tradition as a general epistemic source to develop and adapt over time. Third, it may embody a degree of epistemic humility, acknowledging without thereby falling prey to scepticism or doubt

98 This better accounts for al-Māturīdī's ideas than the 'dual epistemology' theory proposed by Hureyre Kam. In summary, Kam has suggested that al-Māturīdī distinguishes between a tripartite epistemology for general knowledge and a reason-tradition pairing exclusively for knowledge of religion. His rationale is that miracles, which are known through direct sensory perception, are no longer available after the time of prophecy. See Kam, 'Dual Epistemology', pp. 33–34. The theory finds a degree of support in Brodersen, *Tradition und Transformation in der Māturīdiyya des 6./12. Jahrhunderts*, p. 132. Kam's interpretation is not a tenable reading of al-Māturīdī's text, as a couple of examples will suffice to illustrate. First, near the end of his tripartite epistemological discussion, al-Māturīdī points out that inquiry (*naẓar*) is used together with the senses (or reports) in, among other things, affirming the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an (al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, pp. 72–73). This not only directly pertains to establishing the truth of religion but, in the case of the ongoing experiential miracle of the Qur'an, undercuts Kam's rationale for excluding sense experience from the schema. Second, in criticising the application of the term 'body' to God, al-Māturīdī says that, if one could use the term 'without any sensory, narrational or rational evidence', then it would be possible to use words such as *jasad* (body or corpse) and *shakhṣ* (person), which would be corrupt (al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, p. 103). The significant point here is that al-Māturīdī cites sensory evidence as relevant to determining the proper description of God.

99 Cassin (ed.), 'Doxa'.

that there are limits to human epistemic capacities and opportunities to improve them. It is with this possibility in mind that we can return our attention to the contemporary intellectual environment.

Islamic Epistemology Today

It is appropriate to make a few remarks about prevailing understandings of Islamic epistemological discourse, especially in relation to the theological questions that are of principal concern within this volume. Our objective is not to provide a comprehensive account of the entire classical, postclassical and modern trajectory of Islamic thought, but at least to recognise the moment that we are in and thereby situate the present work within it. Interestingly, while many of the approaches to epistemology adopted by today's Islamic scholars producing constructive academic (or academic-adjacent) work in the English language represent a direct continuation of earlier traditions of thought, they also can be classified by the way in which they respond to the challenge of Enlightenment Evidentialism articulated earlier in this Introduction.

The first category, which can be taken as the dominant epistemological framework within Anglophone Islamic thought, broadly comes under the Natural Theology category discussed above. This is an internalist and evidentialist approach, the proponents of which believe that the challenge posed to provide evidence to justify belief in God can both be met in general and through the Islamic tradition in particular. A primary emphasis is therefore placed on rational argumentation, with a secondary focus on resources within the Islamic tradition, including those of scripture, especially the Qur'an. Beyond this, the category is extremely diverse. Some interlocutors have argued for the continued salience of early and classical *kalām* or *falsafa* as paradigmatic expressions of the Islamic theological tradition;¹⁰⁰ some have turned to the postclassical *kalām* tradition, seeing in its intricate philosophical distinctions unmatched epistemological riches;¹⁰¹ others have embraced the promise of *kalām jadīd* (renewed theology), in which the above-mentioned traditions are placed in varying dialogue with the ideas of contemporary thought, and a new up-to-date synthesis is sought. This is also, broadly speaking, where one could place many academic philosophers seeking

100 See Jalajel, 'Extraterrestrials and Moral Accountability'; Jalajel, 'Scientific Realism and Anti-Realism through the Lens of Sunni Divine Action Models'; Malik, *Islam and Evolution*; Andani, 'Divine Simplicity and the Myth of Modal Collapse'.

101 See Karamali, 'Theological Information on the Existence of Intelligent Life outside Our Solar System'; Khan, 'Shades of Structural Realism in Post-Classical Islamic Thought'.

to articulate a specifically Islamic approach to philosophy of religion or religious epistemology.¹⁰²

A quite different approach has been taken by those on the externalist path of a proposed Islamic Reformed Epistemology or Proper Functionalism. Such a perspective typically places considerable emphasis on the idea of *fiṭra*, seeking to explain how Plantingian arguments for the basicity of theism and Christian belief can be turned towards the idea of a natural and universal Islamic belief. Although the representatives of this perspective find themselves in the cut-and-thrust of intellectual argument, a core aspect of their position is that such arguments are not needed in order for one's beliefs to be justified. This perspective is also often critical of the rational arguments prevalent within the circles of historical and contemporary *kalām*, as well as being associated with the theological ideas of Ibn Taymiyya.¹⁰³

Finally, even though Wittgensteinian Fideism is not formally supported by major participants in contemporary Islamic epistemological discussions, there are those whose response to the challenge of Enlightenment Evidentialism contains an irreducible appeal to the supra-rational categories of the Sufi tradition, especially the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī. Arguably, in doing so, such interlocutors make the parallel move of carving out for themselves a sphere of discourse that is insulated from publicly rational evidential requirements. This allows for an internally consistent epistemological paradigm that gives little ground to the claims of Enlightenment Evidentialism, although it also may struggle to convince audiences beyond its own discursive boundaries.¹⁰⁴

The present volume, albeit not claiming to comprehensively capture every perspective that is currently on the table within Islamic thought, offers a good basis to develop this dynamic conversation. This can be encapsulated in three major contributions:

1. Taking stock of key trends, figures and concepts within Islamic intellectual history, which act as the resources for new epistemological theorising.
2. Comparing relevant thinkers and epistemological approaches within Islam and Christianity, thereby showing the relevance of interdisciplinary engagement between the two traditions.

102 See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*; Chowdhury, 'God, Gaps and Gluts'; Chowdhury, 'God, Logic and Lies'; Chowdhury, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil*; Muhtaroglu, 'Plantinga and Ash'arites on Divine Simplicity'; Moad, *Coherence of the Incoherence*; Zarepour, 'Avicenna on Empty Intentionality'.

103 See Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology'; Jalajel, 'Scientific Realism and Anti-Realism through the Lens of Sunnī Divine Action Models'.

104 See Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*; Lahham, *The Anatomy of Knowledge*; Spiker, *Things as They Are*.

3. Identifying the academic subfield of analytic Islamic epistemology and advancing its own 'state of the art' in terms of specific inquiries and themes.

What remains is to explain how the selection of chapters collected here achieves these aims.

Summary of Chapters

This volume is structured in five parts, with each part featuring a trio of chapters. The parts are sequenced in broadly chronological order, moving through Islamic intellectual history in two phases, to comparative Islamic-Christian studies, contemporary Islamic-Christian debates and, finally, possible avenues of new Islamic epistemological investigation.

Part I is titled 'Epistemology outside *Kalām: Falsafa*, Traditionalism and Sufism'. The volume opens with the three non-*kalām* traditions discussed earlier in this Introduction. This opening was chosen for a few reasons. First, the figures that have been selected for study by the contributors to this part typically lived in the formative period before the end of the fourth/tenth century (the exception being Ibn Taymiyya, although he strongly connects himself to the early period). Thus, it makes sense to highlight the diversity of epistemological views in the early Islamic tradition before moving on to a focused study of *kalām* in its classical and postclassical forms in Part II. Second, this initial set of chapters raises crucial questions about evidential certainty, basicality and the complex inner workings of the human heart and mind that resonate throughout the remainder of the book.

In the opening chapter of the volume, 'A New Look at al-Fārābī on Philosophy *versus* Theology', Anthony Booth challenges the received interpretation of al-Fārābī on the relationship between philosophy and theology. Contemporary scholarship has generally concluded that he takes the former to be epistemically superior to the latter; that the latter operates only at the level of rhetoric and dialectics; and that the former deals with demonstrative proof, such that only philosophers can attain proper certainty (on an Aristotelian understanding of it). Booth seeks to cast some doubt as to whether al-Fārābī really thinks that there is such a sharp distinction between the two. He does this by looking anew at his account of certainty, proposing that the importance of understanding and non-accidentality in his account has the following two corollaries: only prophetic knowledge can yield full certainty; and the difference between philosophy and theology cannot be about which of the two grants full certainty. According to Booth, the Fārābian picture of the relationship between them thus turns out to be a more complicated but also more intellectually resonant one.

In his chapter, 'God as an Empirical Entity: The Expanded Scope of Sense Perception in Sunnī Traditionalist Spatialism', Jon Hoover examines the Islamic Traditionalists al-Dārimī (d. ca 281/894), pseudo-Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (*Al-Radd 'ala al-zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya*, fifth/eleventh century) and Ibn Taymiyya who adopt a radically empiricist epistemology that does not lead to scepticism about God's existence but instead embraces God as an empirical reality. These Traditionalist authors blame Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) for introducing the inaccessibility of God to sense perception into the Islamic tradition and thereby stripping God of the fullness of His perfection. With varying degrees of sophistication, al-Dārimī, pseudo-Aḥmad and Ibn Taymiyya claim that all existents are perceptible to the senses, and they deny the existence of extramental immaterial realities and incorporeal intelligibles. God is likewise accessible to the outer senses, particularly hearing and sight. Some of God's messengers have heard and seen God in this life, and believers will see God in Paradise. The chapter explores the implications of this radical empiricism for Traditionalist theology with regard to God's spatial location and extension, and it makes the larger point that religious epistemology is intertwined with ontology and conceptions of God.

Harith Ramli in 'The Tripartite Division of Knowledge and Belief in al-Makkī's *Nourishment of the Hearts*' proposes that the study of religious epistemology in early Islamic thought (third-fifth/ninth-eleventh centuries) has understandably focused mainly on the more explicitly 'rationalist' traditions of *kalām* and *falsafa*. However, most emerging traditions in this period increasingly found it necessary to justify their intellectual foundations, not least the science of Sufism (*ilm al-taṣawwuf*). Focusing on the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), Ramli looks at how an early proponent of what we tend to refer to today as Sufism attempted to ground the spiritual insights of the 'scholars of the esoteric' (*ulamā' al-bāṭin*) on the intellectual foundations of the 'exoteric sciences' (*ulūm al-zāhir*). By studying the tripartite epistemology of al-Makkī against earlier discourses, such as that of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), while paying special attention to the idea of 'inner motive powers' (*khawāṭir*), Ramli explores its implications for the foundations of knowledge at both an individual and social level.

Part II has been named 'Epistemological Sources in *Kalām*: Perception, Reason and Testimony'. The studies here take as their subject classical and postclassical *kalām*, especially the epistemology of the Ash'arī school, albeit with limited reference to Māturīdism. As well as pursuing distinctive lines of investigation touching on the contributions of key figures within these traditions, each of the chapters in this part has a focus on one of the three main epistemic sources admissible within the standard Sunnī *kalām* framework.

In ‘How to Know? Justifying Experience in Classical *Kalām*’, Hannah Erlwein investigates the role of sense experience as proof and as a way to knowledge in *kalām*. Early generations of Islamic theologians were convinced that experienceable phenomena could yield knowledge about unexperienceable phenomena. They referred to this form of reasoning by names such as *al-istishhād bi-l-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib* (bearing witness by what is experienceable to what is unexperienceable). Later generations, however, came to reduce the epistemic role of experience to a mere illustrative tool and replaced their predecessors’ reasoning by other proofs. This chapter reconstructs the shift in the perceived epistemic value of experience in *kalām* through a case study. In his *Kitāb al-shāmil*, Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī gives an account of debates among Ash‘arī and Mu‘tazilī theologians about Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī’s (d. 324/936) invocation of certain experienceable phenomena in his proof that the world depends on God. Erlwein argues that what is at stake in these debates can be illuminated by the contemporary idea of the ‘theory-ladenness’ of experience – that is, the entanglement of empirical data with theoretical assumptions. In her case study, the central point of contention concerns the epistemological relevance of different theories of causality.

Laura Hassan presents a chapter titled ‘Divine Freedom meets Logical Necessity: On the Relationship between Rational Speculation and Knowledge in Classical Ash‘arī Foundationalism’. She argues that classical Ash‘arīs were supremely committed to the preservation, through rational proofs, of their theology of divine freedom, which was effected through the framework provided by their ontology of atoms and accidents. She considers one intersection of the ontology of the classical Ash‘arīs with their foundationalist rationality. This is a dispute recorded by Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī with a position he ascribes to Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā’īnī (d. 418/1027) on whether it is possible for discursive knowledge to be acquired in the absence of reasoning (*naẓar*). Against al-Isfarā’īnī (but in continuity with the thought of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī [d. 403/1013]), al-Juwaynī insists that it is impossible for God to fail to create an accident of knowledge subsequent to His creation of accidents of sound reasoning that include knowledge of a genuinely indicative proof (*dalīl*). Hassan argues that al-Juwaynī’s admission of this rare constraint on divine freedom entirely befits the project of Ash‘arī rationalism. Indeed, without its acknowledgement as a metaphysical necessity, Ash‘arī foundationalism falls.

In his chapter, ‘Mass Transmission of Prophetic Miracles in the Contemplation and Proof of Core Creed’, Aaron Spevack suggests that the necessity to reflect on faith (*wujūb al-naẓar*) leads to the question of just how deep one must go into this reflection and how one might go about ensuring that the reflective process leads to certainty rather than doubt. He argues that responses vary, but one that has not received sufficient attention is the role

of mass-transmitted knowledge (*tawātur*) of prophetic miracles in entailing sound faith and excusing one from the need to defend their beliefs *via* complex rational proofs or appeals to inherent and ingrained faith (*fiṭra*). The chapter treats discussions of mass transmission of Qur'anic teachings and prophetic precedents as a certainty-producing epistemological channel in the writings of postclassical Muslim theologians. In particular, the treatment of Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) on the proof of core creed is contrasted with the more stringent rational demands of the so-called Sanūsian and modified Sanūsian models.

Part III, 'Comparative Studies in Islamic and Christian Epistemology', starts to shift the volume towards placing Islamic religious epistemology within a wider contemporary theistic frame. Contributors attend to both parallels and differences between their chosen thinkers, especially focusing on how engagement with Christian thought, which is better known within English-language academic study, can help one to grapple with varied Islamic ideas.

In 'The Epistemological Status of Causation within al-Ghazālī's Cosmological Argument in Light of Reid's Modest Foundationalism', Ayşenur Ünügür-Tabur explores al-Ghazālī's occasionalist account of causation and its interaction with his cosmological argument, along with his foundationalist epistemological position. She poses the query of whether occasionalism makes his cosmological argument question-begging on epistemological grounds. Specifically, she raises the problem that the 'constant conjunction' of events by God's occasional creation may be too weak and inconclusive to ground the causal premise used in the cosmological argument. She goes on to argue that a plausible resolution of this problem for al-Ghazālī can be found when comparing his epistemic position to the Modest Foundationalism of Thomas Reid.

Amir Emami, in his chapter "Is There any Doubt about God?": Maktab-i Taṣkīk's Religious Epistemology in Comparison with Reformed Epistemology', examines parallel modern responses to strong foundationalism in religious epistemology. He compares Reformed epistemology in Christian theology, as championed by Alvin Plantinga, and the Maktab-i Taṣkīk within Shī'ī theology, founded by Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī. Emami points out that there are some notable similarities within the two schools of thought, including the idea that belief in God's existence does not need to be demonstrated through intellectual reasoning, as well as a similar role for the *sensus divinitatis* and the *fiṭra*, respectively, as aspects of the human being that lead to knowledge of God. Nevertheless, some important differences are shown to hold between the two epistemological theories, which reflect the traditions in which they are embedded and the interlocutors with which they engage.

In his contribution 'Knowing God Personally: Second-person Knowledge in Christian and Islamic Analytic Theology', David Worsley explores

recent developments in the study of the concept of personal knowledge in Christian analytic theology. He argues that applying Eleonore Stump's distinction between non-propositional 'Franciscan' knowledge and propositional 'Dominican' knowledge can be helpful in treating important themes in religious epistemology. Worsley looks at the case of second-person knowledge and extends it to personal knowledge of God, as well as to ideas of divine union and ineffability, highlighting also the significance of narrative. In the final section, he shows how the ideas that he develops are relevant to Islamic theological thought.

Part IV, 'Contemporary Debates on the Basicity of Islamic and Christian Belief', situates the present volume at the heart of an important ongoing debate between Islamic and Christian philosophers of religion. In its simplest terms, this concerns whether the idea that belief in God is properly basic, as prominently argued for by Plantinga, has a place within Islamic religious epistemology. Yet 'Reformed' Christian philosophers did not limit their epistemic claims to this minimal threshold and went on to argue that religion-specific beliefs of Christianity can be warranted in the same way. This raises the question of whether this argument ought to be available to Islamic theologians, and what then can be done to resolve the disagreement in either direction.

In his chapter on 'Fitra Foundationalism', Jamie Turner draws on the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya to elucidate a religious epistemology that is predicated on the concept of the *fiṭra* (natural disposition), a faculty of innate knowledge that can secure warranted belief for epistemic agents. He argues that such a Taymiyyan epistemology can stand as a viable alternative to classical foundationalist models of justification prevalent in traditional *kalām*. He carefully builds up his account of Ibn Taymiyya's normative and religious epistemology from first principles and shows how it paves the way for a more moderate form of foundationalism, one which rejects a theistic evidentialist picture for a different vision that is grounded in the *fiṭra* and the basicity of religious belief. As well as paying attention to the innate capacity of the human being to come to possess knowledge, he highlights the importance of the environment for human epistemic states. After developing the model as a contemporary epistemological theory in considerable detail, Turner formulates responses to a number of pertinent objections.

In 'Dealing with Defeaters for Warranted Islamic Belief: A Reply to Turner', Erik Baldwin seeks to move forward an existing debate over Islamic versions of Plantingian Proper Functionalism. He first clarifies what he sees as misunderstandings in an article by Jamie Turner who had previously presented his Taymiyyan model as superior to Baldwin's own earlier proposal. Next, Baldwin presents what he calls the Multiple Viable Extensions (MVE) defeater. This is the idea that a rational 'Plantingian' who holds their own

tradition-specific religious belief as warranted ought to acquire a defeater from their knowledge that Plantingians of other religions are in the same epistemic situation. Baldwin argues that, *contra* Turner, his model has the resources to deal with this problem. His idea is that initial *qalb* beliefs that give basic warrant are subject to doubts from '*aq^l*' beliefs – such as knowledge of the MVE defeater – and can then be defeated in turn by '*aq^l*' beliefs, restoring warrant. Baldwin finally suggests that a synthesis between his model and that of Turner could prove superior to either one alone.

K. Scott Oliphint in his 'Creation, Sin and Salvation: Essential Categories for a Christian-Theistic Epistemology' stakes out his epistemological vision for a Reformed Christian-Theistic Epistemology. At the heart of his account is the acknowledgement within Christian thought that the human being is a covenantal creature, one made in the image of God. This, according to Oliphint, initially secured a good epistemic standing. Yet with the event of the Fall, sin has distorted these faculties in a major way, such as to make natural religious knowledge impossible. The only way in which the human *sensus divinitatis* can operate correctly once more is from the salvation offered by trust in Jesus Christ. Oliphint puts this framework for the basicity of Christian belief into conversation with Turner's Taymiyyan model and its concept of the *fiṭra*. Here, Oliphint argues for the superiority of his model based on the way in which it accounts for the pervasive effects of sin on the human being's epistemic state in terms of one's breaking of the covenant and the suppression of truth.

In Part V of the volume, 'Islamic Epistemology Today: Disciplinary, Scriptural and Social Discourses', the focus shifts to considering what the future of analytic Islamic epistemology may hold in terms of significant distinct themes. From light-hearted advice for the craft of analytic philosophy; through returning to the core Islamic scripture, the Qur'an, with new 'virtue epistemological' eyes; to scoping the prospects for an Islamic 'social turn', the final set of contributors takes stock of this nascent field and moves the conversation forward.

In 'Advice for Muslim Epistemologists', Kelly James Clark riffs on Plantinga's 1984 essay 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', penning some practical and enlightening advice for Muslims seeking to engage in the field of analytic epistemology within the contemporary academy. He explores this topic through the questions of 'what?' (consideration of appropriate content), 'who?' (sensitivity to one's audience) and 'why?' (aims of engaging in epistemological study). Drawing on his own published work and long engagement in the field of analytic Christian epistemology, as well as his interactions with Muslim scholars, Clark maps out some of the main pitfalls that he feels can be avoided by Muslims seeking to contribute to this discourse. He ends with some brief constructive reflections on what it means epistemologically to be a creature.

In his chapter, 'Epistemological Foundations of Qur'anic Ethics: Understanding, Wisdom and Righteousness', M. Ashraf Adeel argues that the Qur'anic discourse insists on what in contemporary terms may be called a virtue epistemology. Holistic understanding is a state that results from the many virtuously formed true beliefs in it and grasping of their interdependencies. Most of these true beliefs need to have attained the status of knowledge. Rounding out this conceptual map of Qur'anic epistemology is the notion of wisdom, which he reads as a kind of practical meta-understanding, and *taqwā* (righteousness), which is a settled disposition for right action produced by it. By exploring the nuances of these concepts within the Qur'an and some of its classical commentaries and by relating them to Islamic discourses about the human soul, Adeel is able to propose an epistemological reading of the Qur'anic notion of conscience and the kind of ethical rationality needed to reach it.

Closing out the main part of the volume with his chapter 'Individualism and Anti-individualism in Islamic Epistemology', John Greco considers how the 'social turn' in epistemology might be fruitful when applied to the Islamic tradition. In the first part of the chapter, he proposes a particular conception of social epistemic dependence, which he argues helps understanding what is at issue between individualists and anti-individualists in epistemology. Greco argues that social epistemic dependence is best conceived as a kind of 'vulnerable' dependence. That is, it is a dependence on other persons (or on other aspects of one's social environment), with no guarantee that those persons (or environment) are dependable. In the second part of the chapter, he asks whether Islamic epistemology should be understood as individualist or anti-individualist and, specifically, whether Islamic epistemology allows for vulnerable dependence in the epistemic domain. He therefore asks how the Islamic tradition understands the epistemology of testimony, especially with respect to the testimony of scripture and the prophets. Second, he asks to what extent the Islamic tradition endorses an intellectual division of labour within Islamic communities. Rather than seeking answers, Greco's contribution is to raise interesting and important questions through the resources of contemporary social epistemology for others who specialise in the Islamic tradition to explore further.

The volume is capped with a brief Afterword by the editors who reflect on themes explored by the contributions, on questions answered and new ones raised in analytic Islamic epistemology.

Notes about This Volume

Many edited volumes are collections of convenience more than design. Some loose organising principle is adopted to give structure to chapters on an admittedly related theme, but one would lose little by reading the contents in

any other order, or if they were published as separate online articles instead. Our deliberate intent in the process of scholarly collaboration that led to this volume, as well as subsequent editorial work on it, has been to resist this tendency and to produce a single book with its own internal logic, as the overview provided in the previous section should have brought into focus. With the stage-setting provided in this Introduction, we hope that readers of all kinds will feel confident enough to tackle the book in its printed order, even if they lack a background in Islamic studies or analytic epistemology. Realistically, however, we know that academic readers of this kind will likely be in the minority. A second viable way to go is for readers interested in pre-modern Islamic intellectual history to focus on Parts I and II, those looking for comparative theology to read Parts III and IV, and those intrigued by modern and contemporary debates to explore Parts III, IV and V. We feel that this 'modular' aspect of the volume is a great strength, with the different chapters within each part speaking to each other in all sorts of interesting ways. Nevertheless, each chapter is fully self-contained and does not rely on any other chapter for its argument to be appreciated.

Terminology and vocabulary within this volume have presented a challenge, with both the technical Arabic lexicon of the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition and the technical English one of the analytic traditions taking their respective places. Glossaries with key terminology for each of these domains can be found at the back of the book. Additionally, as editors, we have worked hard to make sure that there is clarity and consistency to each chapter, in line with the series style of Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Scripture and Theology, while allowing individual authors to breathe in expressing their preferred approach. We are pleased with the result as a collective intervention, not only in the ongoing quest to know God, but also in overcoming the epistemic barriers that prevent us from better knowing each other within and between our religious traditions.

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